

COASTAL IMPACT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM REQUEST

1. Project Title: Wading Bird and Shorebird Surveys
2. Entity Nominating Project: Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program
3. Contact Information: Kerry St. Pé
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4. Total CIAP Funds Requested: \$160,000
(\$40,000/year for fiscal year's FY07, 08, 09, and 10)
5. Infrastructure Funds Proposed: \$0
6. Description and Location of Project:

Historical surveys of both wading bird and shorebird nesting colonies since the 1960's have shown decreases over time, however, due to differences in methodology it is difficult to say with any certainty that this is the case. Most ornithologists do believe that many of these birds are suffering from population declines but little is known as to why this might be happening.

Recently, there have been efforts to conduct surveys via fixed wing aircraft, particularly since 2001 while throughout the 90's these surveys were conducted using helicopters making direct comparisons difficult. Even more recently, there was a comparison of techniques – fixed winged aircraft vs. helicopter vs. ground counts. That evaluation suggested that use of fix winged aircraft was not a desirable methodology for assessing population of different species within colonies.

Due to the outcome of that recent evaluation and because of the devastating consequences of Hurricane's Katrina and Rita, the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program is providing the funds for a helicopter survey of the entire Louisiana coast to assess both known shorebird colonies and wading bird colonies south of I-10. Further rational for this decision was based on anecdotal reports that many known wading bird colonies are either failing or the birds are choosing not to nest at all. Whether this is a real and widespread phenomenon is not known.

In order to understand population shifts and geographical shifts of numerous species of both wading birds and shorebirds, BTNEP and its partners plan to continue annual surveys as long as practical. It is believed that Hurricane's Rita and particularly Katrina will have profound effects on both groups of birds. Long term effects may show up over time supporting the need for annual surveys at least over the next several years.

In order to conduct these annual surveys, the BTNEP program is requesting CIAP funding. Monies provided through this grant would be used to provide for helicopter time.

7. Project Type:

Implementation of a federally approved
Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan.

8. Project Justification:

Many of Louisiana's coastal forests, marsh habitats, and barrier islands have suffered effects of oil and gas exploration. In particular, dredging of navigation channels to support onshore and offshore oil and gas exploration has caused the direct loss of these habitats, while the construction of infrastructure to support these activities have had similar consequences. In addition, the increased subsidence rates associated with the sub surface withdrawal of mineral deposits have also taken there toll. Each of these combined have had some negative affect on both wading birds and shorebirds.

As a result of Hurricane's Katrina and Rita, it is expected that many known colonies will relocate to new areas. To prevent new channels, pipelines, and other infrastructure development that supports OCS activities from negatively impacting new colonies, it is imperative that we survey the coast on an annual basis. This should be done at least for the next few years as colonies will likely move over the short term till an appropriate location is found. This is particularly true for shorebirds.

9. Project Cost Share:

The BTNEP Program has committed up to \$50,000 for this year's survey and is committed to future surveys if a cost share partner can be identified. In addition, biologists from both federal and state agencies will be working on this year's survey. While it is difficult to assess that contribution, it is likely that amounts to a few thousand dollars per year.